Chapter VIII

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CHANGES

In studying change in the customs surrounding childbirth in Bang Chan, we have D.B. Bradley's description of birth in Bankok in 1865 as a base-line on which to project our findings. Since most of the population of Bang Chan (Thai, with a few Laotians, Mon, Muslims, and Chinese) stems from Bangkok, we may reasonably assume that the parallels derive from a true historical connection. Bradley's description fitted Bang Chan as if written today:

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> "Siamese theory in regard to the part which external and internal fire plays in the functions of life and health is made to work powerfully...There is, at such times, a diminution of heat in the body, and consequent liability to stagnation of the blood, which, if not guarded against by fire, will leave the uterus flabby and enlarged, bad humors in circulation, a consequent weak state of the stomach, resulting in the secretion of too little milk, and that of a bad quality for the child, all of which will be likely to be followed by a host of other fearful maladies to both mother and child...[Thus a woman lies by the fire]... exposing all parts of her body, and more particularly her abdomen, to that drying process, so that the uterus shall be forced to shrink up quickly to its normal dimensions, and the sanguineous streams which had been diverted to support the child before birth, shall, by fire, be driven backward to their more usual limitations, all which is...a sine qua non to a sound constitution and good health in the future..." (Bangkok Calendar, 1865:78-84).

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Bradley showed that some behavior one might call "change" today was a recognized alternative in 1865. For instance, in Bang Chan a few women "are made too unhappy (klum) by the fire so cannot use it. They should take extra amounts of pickled medicine" (nâ dông). Bradley wrote, "a few delicate females...who cannot endure [this] usual treatment, are compelled, against all their ...fears of the consequences, and all the importunities of their

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friends to say positively that they cannot and will not endure it. For such, some other course has to be taken by the use of ...medicines" (p. 81).[74]

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The most noticeable modification in the customs of childbirth was the shortened fire-rest which had shifted from 29 or so days, to 9 to 15 or less; this was practiced by everyone.[75] Another conspicuous change adopted by a few dozen persons was the substitution for the open fire of a heat-making contrivance, in particular the hot-ashes or charcoal burning container (chamber or fire-box: *fai-chut*) and the hot water bottle. (The hot brick and wrapped pot of hot salt were probably old alternatives.) New, of course, were the occasional utilization of the Minburi Health Center; the second class doctors; and, somewhat more generally, the novelties of the market, such as flowered net-frames, mits, shirts, pillowcases, and pacifiers. There were a few other changes noted.

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Who took up the innovations? First, they were women who had already successfully borne a child, undergone a full fire-rest, and were bearing their second or later children. Being already ritually mature (*suk*) and of proven competence in childbearing, they had no reason to fear a change and nothing to lose. Age and experience gave them the self-confidence, authority, and interest to ponder their experience and decide on ways to increase their effectiveness and their comfort. They had the right to do so because of the fundamental autonomy of the individual. Strong-minded old ladies might criticise the substitution of the hot-ashes container for the fire, feeling it was not hot enough to do the job, but they never questioned the woman's right to do so. The least likely to adopt

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74. On the other hand, Bradley (pp. 82-83) was puzzled why his success in saving the life of so revered a personage as the Queen by taking her off the fire, a move so thoroughly approved by the King, did not cause universal abandonment of the fire-rest. He was not aware that many a *mɔ̄* did the same (with the possible exception of the sponging with tepid water), that as a *mɔ̄*-with-a-particular-specialty he could do anything he wanted but no one would copy it without personal formal authorization, and that he was up against the deeply-rooted rite of female maturation concerning which even royalty had no authority (Bangkok Calender, 1871:187-189).

75. We have no data on whether this shortening process set in in the 1930's, or after World War II in the late 1940's. The month-long rest was universal in the 1920's.

better nutrition for all family members or whether to concentrate on the feeding of children or other vulnerable groups, the values of the society should be considered. The importance of a suitable variety of food for health needs to be taught to adults as well as children in Bang Chan. The concept that good choice of food is important in pregnancy and lactation and for the health and growth of children seemed to be entirely absent. Since few believed certain foods to be harmful at these times, however, teaching how to choose foods for health should be easier in Bang Chan than it is in areas where positive taboos are common.

Behavior different from the traditional one may sometimes lead the way to changed practices among those who observe or hear about it. For this reason, in certain instances an informant who had ventured to deviate from the traditional practice has been identified in this record. Thus, we noted that in a number of ways the women school teachers and the wife of a man teacher deviated from the traditional behavior in Bang Chan. For example, a school teacher's wife used the hot ashes chamber after her fifth child rather than lying by the fire. She was one of two women informants who "ate all kinds of food" at this time when most women in the community restricted their diets very markedly. She did not consider taking the baby out into the sunshine harmful; indeed, she believed it would make the child stronger. This same mother was 1 of 4 in our series who had taken the baby to be vaccinated against smallpox. She and three women school teachers were among those who continued to give their babies boiled water to drink much longer than was customary in Bang Chan. The one person who suggested a specific food (eggs) as being good for a woman to eat during pregnancy was a school teacher. The two women who planned to go to the Nimburi Health Center for delivery were school teachers. For lack of time after labor began they did not carry out their plans; but the fact that they intended to do, by choice, what was usually the last resort when labor proved long or difficult, may be significant.

Along with these departures from traditional ways and acceptance of some "modern" practices, the same persons might cling to other sorts of traditional behavior. The wife of a school teacher for example, though she thought that taking the baby into the sunshine might be favorable rather than harmful, said that if the baby were to be out very long she would cover its head with a beret to avoid bringing "cold" into the baby. This same mother took her child to the Nimburi Health Center for treatment for a skin infection, but when the condition did not clear up immediately after modern therapy was begun, she took the child to a traditional doctor who prepared a decoction of herbs with which she treated the baby.

The behavior of respected persons, such as some of the school teachers, should be influential in helping to bring about

desirable changes in Bang Chan. An important point, however, is that leaders should understand, insofar as possible, the reasons behind the "modern" ways and not accept them merely because they are considered modern. Without adequate understanding traditional behavior which has served a useful purpose in protecting the people's health might be abandoned, or a half-understood "modern" way substituted to their hazard. For example, a popular traditional midwife said she knew that water was not boiled for mothers and babies in the hospitals in Bangkok, and the wife of a school teacher said she did not think use of boiled water was really necessary during (2)juu (1)faj. Traditionally, heat has been considered beneficial at this time. If this idea were extended to include an understanding of the value of boiling water to destroy harmful microorganisms and parasites, the traditional practice might be confirmed and even extended for the protection of other family members. If a sanitary water supply eventually becomes available in Bang Chan[1], precautions required to keep it so might be thought of as analogous to boiling of water; or chemical purification might be understood by the peasant as a modern way of conferring on water the virtues which boiling conferred when the "old way" was followed. Improvement in health and nutrition in Bang Chan must, of course, be seen as a long-time goal dependent on continuing education.

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[32] 1. In 1952-54 there were no wells in the area, and the problem of planning for a sanitary water supply when the plain is flooded for a part of each year is not an easy one.

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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fictive terms is of course sometimes prompted by nothing more than the desire to be polite, but equally often it symbolizes genuine feelings of affection and obligation not too different from what the terms imply when they are used in their original kinship context. Bang Chaners have a wonderfully convenient term, *phyan-yaad*, a compound meaning literally "family friends," which is used to refer both to friends to whom ego feels so close that he considers them members of his family and to individuals whom he considers his friends *because* they are members of his family. The particular persons to whom this term, as well as those noted above, is applied vary widely from informant to informant (expectedly so because they are non-institutionalized terms). However, the point to be emphasized is that for all villagers kinship provides a basic referential mechanism for expressing the degree of psychological affiliation that they feel toward other human beings.

An *awareness* of degrees of psychological affiliation and obligation and of the modes for expressing such sentiments are very much a part of village life. For with the exception of the five institutions mentioned above, most Bang Chaners, as I have noted elsewhere (Sharp *et al.* 1956: 241), are really not obliged—and do not feel obliged—to be beholden to anyone but themselves. In a very real sense, the village is comprised of 1,771 individualists whose major goals in life are to obtain sufficient land to support themselves, their growing children, and their religion, free from physical insecurities and unencumbered by entangling social obligations. When they enter into relationships with other people they do so with an awareness that they are always acting of their own free will.

Despite the conventions of ethnographic reporting, it is difficult to delimit the precise nature of the nuclear family in Bang Chan. The nuclear family clearly is the ideal for all villagers, but because Bang Chaners are just as responsive to convenience as they are to custom, there is considerable variation regarding this ideal. In his study of the economy of the village, Janlekha (1955) found it necessary to distinguish five different kinds of functioning, mutually exclusive household units in Bang Chan: the typical nuclear family (59.4 percent of all households); a limited extended family, consisting of a man, wife, either or both their sets of parents, and unmarried children (8.1 percent); an extended family, consisting of the limited extended family plus married children, the latters' children, and any collateral relatives of any generation (26.8 percent); a one-person family (5.4 percent); and the ecclesiastical "family," consisting of the order of Buddhist monks, the only truly corporate group in the village (0.3 percent). (These variations of the nuclear family, all localized groups, should of course not be confused with what I, following Sharp [1957], have been calling the kindred, with what Kaufman [1960] refers to as spatially and

4:Phillips E-4,5 (1956-1957) 1966
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the villagers is contrasted with those cases of separation or divorce which are viewed as resulting more from social psychological reasons: arguments, contrariness, general incompatability, and wasting or not sharing money. The squandering of money is a most frequent cause of family discord contributing to family dissolution, especially when it involves the three aphoristic evils of Thai life: women, whiskey, and opium (although, in fact, I know of only two cases where Bang Chaners have been reputed to smoke opium).

Precise figures on the divorce or separation rate in Bang Chan are unknown, primarily because many marriages as well as divorces are never registered on the government rolls; also, many separations seem to follow an on-again-off-again pattern; the sanctioned occurrence of polygyny (only eight known cases out of the 296 families) and even polyandry (two known cases) complicates the problem even further. However, the fact that *four months* after I had designated a sample of thirty families from which to select informants, six of those families, or 20 percent of the sample population, had dissolved would strongly suggest that Bang Chan families are not particularly stable.

The causes of family fission in these specific cases are unknown, but what is impressive is the apparent ease with which it takes place and the equanimity with which people seem to accept it. Other informants, reporting their own experiences or observations, discuss family breakups as if they were among the more normal events of the workaday world and completely understandable. They seem to be of no greater emotional import—in the sense of eliciting recognizable feelings of distress—than losing a good price on the sale of a piece of land or on the sale of some rice. In fact, the latter kinds of situations are considerably more likely to evoke expressions of hurt or exasperation. One repeatedly encounters in Bang Chan instances on the following order: a family breaks up simply because the husband has an inclination to work for a particular person whom he likes; a wife ("she is a touchy woman") runs away every time she has a minor disagreement with her husband (minor even by village standards, for example, "Should I buy my lottery tickets from Mr. X or Mr. Y?"; "Should we invite seven monks or ten monks to officiate at this ceremony?"). The point here is that these explanations—and the low tolerance for discord, the importance to a person of a boss or job over a spouse, the desire to be footloose, which they imply—are to the villagers completely reasonable justifications for the dissolution of family units.

Many of the family relationships referred to above as "centripetal" in nature are clearly related to or derived from patterns of social organization characteristic of an earlier Bang Chan. Although most evidence indicates that even in the years immediately following the settlement of the village in

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Giggling is very often used in the marketplace when an item must be bargained over. Similarly, a villager who wants to quit working for another will usually preface his request with some giggling, although equally often he will just leave—saying absolutely nothing—and will later send a middleman to collect his wages and make the severance official. The latter alternative is prompted by the desire to avoid *all* awkwardness.

The third major form of the villagers' politeness—that associated with making a good impression on others—has to a certain extent been covered by the materials already presented. Thus, in terms of the actual manifestations, there is really little difference between flattering another person, for example, because it will make him feel good, because it will make getting something out of him much easier, or because it will make one appear much more attractive in his eyes. However, it is clear that the motivations in these three cases are all quite different. It is for this reason that this last category has been introduced. When villagers meet another person whom they regard as significant (and this by no means includes all their contacts) they do put forth considerable effort to make a good impression on him. And being polite—courteous, helpful, flattering—is one of the most suitable means for achieving this effect.

Discussion of this interactive mode would perhaps not be necessary were villagers themselves not so keenly aware of it. Village children are continually and consciously taught, by word and deed, the necessity always to put their best foot forward (cf. the earlier illustrations in *Characteristics of a Good Person*). Bang Chaners assess themselves and others in terms of their capacity to make themselves appealing: both the "good" and the "competent" person is one who can make himself attractive by speaking softly, gently, and if possible, beautifully and cleverly. Often villagers take offense at an individual who refuses to do this because his very refusal suggests that he does not feel respect for others. Again, it should be emphasized that we are talking here about the form of behavior, not the substance or commitment behind it.

What the ultimate psychological roots of this behavior are is unclear. It is apparent—largely because of the great attention given to formal considerations such as manners, proper speech, and the like—that this concern is not prompted primarily by the desire to be loved by others. Love would require a more substantial medium. Gaining the respect and approval of others is clearly an important component of the attitude, but one wonders why a people otherwise so self-loving and self-accepting should need their self-esteem repeatedly validated by others. Perhaps the most important reason behind the villagers' concern with impressing others really has little to do with the others themselves, although obviously at the behavioral level it implicates them—that is, I would suggest that the major factor behind the

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considered of moment by the group. I think that it can be demonstrated that when precept and activity draw too far apart, a modification of one or the other is likely to take place to close up the gap.

In assessing my psychological test materials, I take the following position with regard to this issue. The distinction between the ideal and the real is an analytic requirement because obviously there are some instances where the two patterns are not congruent. However, once such distinction has been made there is no inherent necessity to assume that there *must* be a gap between the two patterns or if there is a gap, to assume that it must be especially wide. One will inevitably encounter in Bang Chan cases where subordinates are not spoken to "with kind and agreeable words." But on the whole, the extent to which real behavior does accord with this precept is impressive. For the most part, it is not a mere verbalism but rather a viable guide to action: a subordinate who is not treated with kind and agreeable words will not (depending of course on other situational factors as well) long maintain his ties to his superior. This same reasoning applies to the majority of the cases in which informants couch their responses in terms of cultural ideals.

A third aspect of the responses concerns the psychological "level" at which they will be interpreted. Because of the highly realistic nature of the completions, the necessity to interpret them in Thai terms (which precludes "blind analyses"—see DuBois 1944) and the necessity to work with the pooled responses of many individuals, our interpretations will not go psychodynamically very "deep." On the other hand, neither will we remain at the level of the manifest meanings of the responses. Although an informant's completion may represent a precise description of the way he would behave in real life, and in many cases does, it is more sensible from an analytic standpoint to view the response as a symptom of an underlying, more generalized, psychological orientation. The reasons for this are twofold: first, many of the responses which are superficially different seem to express simply alternate facets of a single, underlying predisposition; second, and more important, we must remember that on theoretical grounds personality characteristics are not, as Inkeles and Levinson point out (1954: 981) "phenotypic, behavior-descriptive terms, but rather are higher level abstractions that refer to stable, generalized dispositions or modes of functioning and may take a great variety of concrete behavioral forms."

In these terms, a statement such as *"When he saw that others avoided him, he . . .* also avoids them" indicates not only a person's desire not to associate with those who avoid him but, more important, an underlying, more general disposition *to accept and maintain a breakdown in social relations.* Moreover, the latter interpretation also encompasses such varying responses as: ". . . must not speak to them because they are bad. They